



Influencing organizational identification during major change: A communication-based perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the concept of organizational identification can provide new and valuable insights into the dynamics of organizational change and its management. It introduces the notion of shift in identification, which consists of dis- and re-identification states that organizational members experience during change, and proposes a framework for the study of the communication-based influence strategies used by management to induce such shifts. The article introduces the concept of confluence, which involves providing some sense of self-consistency to members during change. Two empirical examples illustrating the influence strategies used by management are analyzed. Implications to the wider discourses on language, identification and change are addressed.

KEYWORDS

influence strategies ■ management communication ■
organizational change ■ organizational identification

Introduction

Although numerous studies have been conducted on organizational change and much has been written on organizational identification, these two streams of research have largely ignored each other. However, the concept of identification provides great potential for shedding light on change dynamics. The change literature recognizes that organizational level change is mediated

by change at the individual level (Tannenbaum & Hanna, 1985) and much has been written about how managers attempt to influence members to accept changes. The literature on identification helps explain the links between the organization and the individual and describes how management induces members to accept organizational interests and decision premises (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Despite the potential for these two streams of research to inform each other, there has been little cross-fertilization between studies on change and studies on identification. This article attempts to bridge these two streams of research and argues that the notion of identification provides valuable insights into organizational change and its management.

The concept of organizational identification has been studied by researchers in the areas of organizational behavior and organizational communication. These two areas approach the issue of identification from different perspectives. In the organizational behavior literature, identification is defined as 'the degree to which a member defines him/herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization' (Dutton et al., 1994: 239). Identification is said to result in an organizational identity for the individual that is part of his/her social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The organizational communication literature, on the other hand, views identification as a language-based process of sharing in the substance of an organization (Sass & Canary, 1991). In this literature, identification is seen as the result of different factors, the most significant of which is communication by management, which is considered an important component in inducing member identification with the organization (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999). These two perspectives are complementary in that the organizational behavior literature places emphasis on identification from an individual or micro perspective, whereas the communication literature focuses on the macro aspect of identification inducement through the use of communication-based strategies emanating from management.

Neither of the two perspectives, however, has devoted enough attention to identification during change. Yet the concept of identification provides a useful lens to the understanding of the relationship between changes at the individual and organizational levels. Organizational identification involves the appropriation of the organizational identity by the member (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987); an identifying member enacts the organizational identity. However, this identity needs to be modified during organizational change, rendering members' previously desirable enactment dysfunctional in the new situation. For organizational change to take effect, it should be appropriated by members and therefore must be accompanied by change in members' identifications. Such change, however, can be problematic; resistance to

change has been well documented in the literature. Much research has been devoted to what managers should do to influence members to accept organizational change. Nevertheless, this research has largely overlooked how identifications can be influenced during change.

This article argues that the identification perspective enhances the understanding of change by shedding light on both changes at the individual level that must accompany changes at the organizational level and the management of change by focusing on identification inducement strategies. It calls for conceptualizing organizational change as involving *shifts in member identification*. It argues that although member identification with prevailing organizational attributes is, in general, beneficial to the organization, it can become an impediment to the implementation of major change. This calls for communication strategies from management aimed at inducing member *dis-identification* with previous organizational attributes and *re-identification* with new ones. The article also explores how communication establishes *confluence*, which refers to the maintenance of some continuity during change. Confluence provides anchors to the past that organizational participants rely on for a sense of self-consistency. In general, emphasis is placed on the language used by management in its communication with employees. This is consistent with a recent trend in organizational studies whereby the use of language is considered a major factor in expressing and creating reality, particularly change (Sillince, 1999), and in exercising influence in organizations (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). The article also provides an empirical illustration and analysis of management's identification inducement strategies during change.

Identification and identification inducement

Cheney and Tompkins indicate that identification can be conceived of as 'the appropriation of identity' by an individual or collective and that such appropriation 'subsumes something acquired and something invested' by the individual or collective (1987: 5). There is general agreement that organizational identification is accompanied by cognitive, affective and behavioral components (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; Harquail, 1998). The more the member comes to view the organization as definitive of his or her own self, the stronger the identification, and the higher the cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment of the individual in the organization. The more strongly members identify with the organization and appropriate its attributes, the more they will think, behave and feel in ways that express this identity; they will seek opportunities to enact the identity (Ashforth, 2001).

For example, Anderson-Gough et al.'s (2000) study indicates that members who appropriate the service ethic that defines their organization, adopt attitudes and behaviors consistent with this ethic. They enact a professional identity that requires particular modes of self-presentation, a willingness to work long hours to meet clients' needs and acceptance that family and friends may be marginalized.

Research on how management induces member identification with the organization has built largely on the work of Kenneth Burke. Such research is premised on the notion that individuals have a tendency to identify as a result of divisions in society (Burke, 1969). Identification provides the possibility of inclusion in social groups. Individuals have a predisposition to identify with social entities as a way of securing meaning. Member identification satisfies a number of individual needs including the needs for safety, affiliation, self-enhancement and meaning in one's life (Pratt, 1998).

In fact, if members' desire to identify with the organization is predicated on a search for meaning, management's communication provides excellent opportunities to furnish such meaning. Pfeffer (1981) indicates that frequent communication by management leads to the development of a common set of shared meanings about the organization that provide members with a sense of belonging and identity. Cheney (1983) points out that people have the tendency to identify spontaneously with a target such as their organization, and that such identification is encouraged by the organization through persuasive communication. The individual who is inclined to identify is open to such communication and has a willingness to embrace the organization's values and decision premises. While management cannot control completely the meanings that members will attribute to its communications, it can carefully choose labels and arguments that are captivating and evocative to participants. As Pondy indicates, 'language is a major tool of social influence' and one of 'the least visible of (such) influences' (1978: 91-2).

In a classic statement, Tompkins and Cheney (1985) argue that organizations exercise control over members through the communication and inculcation of decision premises. Building on Simon's (1976) arguments, they propose that 'a decision maker identifies with an organization when he or she desires to choose the alternative that best promotes the perceived interests of that organization' (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985: 194). As such, upper management engages in managing members' identifications and ensuring that the organization is the target of identification. These authors propose the notion of enthymeme₂, 'a syllogistic decision-making process, individual or collective, in which a conclusion is drawn from premises (beliefs, values, expectations) inculcated in the decision maker(s) by the controlling members

of the organization' (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985: 189). They make a distinction between enthymeme₁, which draws its premises from values and beliefs acquired by the audience through socialization in the family, education and others (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999), and enthymeme₂ where the source of the premise is the organization itself. Because of the many voices with which society speaks, organizations are compelled to provide their members with those premises that are organizationally functional. Control is exercised unobtrusively in what Tompkins and Cheney call 'the concertive organization', where the shared understanding of goals and means prevails. Communication plays a major role in the exercise of control through the inculcation of premises used in the enthymemic process and the management of identification.

Association and dissociation

In a study of identification inducement used in messages to employees, Cheney (1983) found that organizations use the strategies mentioned by Kenneth Burke, which involve association and dissociation. Association aims at establishing a connection between the organization and the employee. The 'common ground technique' is an association strategy that *explicitly* indicates that the organization shares the employee's values and goals, 'and offers him or her "identity"' (Cheney, 1983: 148). An association is created between organizational and individual attributes; each shares in the substance of the other. The association tactics Cheney observed were: expressing organizational concern for the individual; recognizing individual contributions; promoting shared values and norms of behavior; advocating benefits available to employees; reporting praise by outsiders; and providing testimonials by employees. An example of association tactics can be seen in an article appearing in *Tennessee Teacher* analyzed by McMillan (1987). The article reports on a teacher, Jane Poole, and commends her effort and methods. While providing recognition and praise to the individual for her success in teaching remedial reading, the communication also sets norms for behavior to other employees.

Association is also established *implicitly* through the use of the assumed 'we', which portrays subtly common interests or values between the rhetor and the audience (Cheney, 1983). For example, in a study of a position document on sexism produced by the council of a religious body, McMillan found the rhetor of the document (the church council) to use an abundance of 'we/our' in addressing an issue likely to be contested by the church members. Such use courted members to adopt the position of the rhetor by building trust and reminding the internal constituency of the longstanding relationship and commitment that holds the membership together.

Identification inducement can also be achieved through dissociation, or by antithesis. The strategy involved often invokes a major threat from the outside that calls for insiders' unification to defeat the threat. An example of this tactic is a message from top management informing members how government regulation can threaten the future of an organization and its employees' careers (Cheney, 1983).

Cheney's findings regarding the communication-based association and dissociation strategies are consistent with propositions by authors in the organizational behavior literature. For example, the latter indicates that a condition leading to higher identification is the strength of the fit between members' values and organizational values (Dutton et al., 1994). In addition, members' identification is stronger when the group to which they belong can maintain a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups. Conditions that foster identification provide evidence of association tactics used by management. These tactics include indicating that the organization shares the member's goals and values as well as reporting praise by outsiders, thus casting the organization in an attractive and distinctive light. Another condition leading to identification is external threats to the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Reporting threats is the essence of dissociation tactics.

DiSanza and Bullis (1999) conducted a study on identification inducement strategies in a newsletter by the US Forest Service. They found evidence of the strategies outlined by Cheney (1983) and extended the common ground tactics to include 'invitation' (asking members to become part of an organizational group) and 'bragging' (communicating dedication to competence). However, it should be noted that the strategies elaborated by Cheney and built on by DiSanza and Bullis do not relate to a context of change.

In her study, McMillan (1988) focused on the rhetorical tactics used by a religious institution as it attempted an alignment with changing social interests. Although she did not approach the subject of change from an identification perspective, her findings are informative to the study of identification inducement during change. She argued that the major power tool available to the institution was rhetorical and observed the use of several tactics by the institution to adjust people to ideas and vice versa. These included the creation of a common ground between the rhetor and the audience, building on the premises held by the members and achieving a balance between the old and the new. The latter is an important aspect of appealing to the audience during change.

In fact, change ushers in a context requiring the use of unique identification strategies. In a relatively stable context, identification inducement is

aimed at encouraging members to associate themselves with prevailing organizational attributes. However, during major change, organizational attributes need to be transformed, rendering members' identifications with such attributes dysfunctional from an organizational standpoint. How does identification inducement proceed in this context?

Major change and identification inducement

To the extent that organizational participants are inclined to identify with the organization, management strategies facilitate and strengthen the identification. This leads to the participants' behaving in organizationally functional ways and to their acceptance of the organizational decision premises (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985) and norms for behavior (Shamir, 1990). However, when major change must be implemented, there is a need for the organization to acquire new attributes that often call for new norms of behavior. Members' previous identifications, which involve cognitive, behavioral and affective components and which were once functional, become a hindrance to the implementation of the change.

This is because system changes are mediated by individuals, and the latter tend to hold on to familiar and valued ways of being and of doing things (Lewin, 1951; Tannenbaum & Hanna, 1985). Major change implies the loss of a system of relationships with co-workers, customers or other stakeholders, and a particular conception of one's work, status and role within an organization – all of which are components of a person's self-definition within the organization (Reitter et al., 1991). Giving up familiar attitudes, behaviors and perspectives that emanate from one's identifications opens the possibility for the uncertain and creates fear of the unknown, leading people to hold on to past identifications (Tannenbaum & Hanna, 1985).

Resisting change is caused in part by people's desire not to lose something of value. Bridges points out that 'one of the first losses in any transition is the sense of one's identity in the former situation' (1986: 28). This loss is described by Tunstall as an 'identity crisis' in his study of change at Bell whereby a

soft, collective voice almost could be heard saying: 'I knew the old Bell system. . . In that knowledge, I had identity and confidence about my company and myself. Now . . . with the loss of our mission – universal service . . ., I find myself asking, "Who are we?" "Who am I?" '

(1985: 59)

Dis-identification and re-identification

Effective organizational change requires a shift in members' identifications. Such a shift entails two states, dissociation from previous attributes and re-association with new ones. We can label these two states *dis-identification* and *re-identification*. Dis-identification requires that members give up previous identifications with the past undesirable attributes of the organization and divest themselves of the 'old' perspectives, attitudes and behaviors associated with them ('unfreezing' in Lewin's theory). It implies letting go the undesirable aspects of the 'old' identity to allow space for the 'new' desired ones (Bridges, 1986).

When dis-identification occurs, members experience a disconnection from the organization. Ashforth (2001) uses the term 'liminal' to characterize the state in which individuals in transition may find themselves. Liminality describes a lack of self-defining connection to a social entity. This situation calls for alternate meanings to be supplied to members (Bartunek, 1993), and these are often available in the form of new representations of the organization. During planned change, top management elaborates a new vision for the organization that calls for a different way of doing things. Such new vision constructs a new set of attributes that replace the destroyed ones (Biggart, 1977). Change can be implemented more easily if participants accept the new attributes and are able to enact them. To do this, however, members must divest themselves of old perspectives and behaviors and appropriate new ones. The appropriation of new attributes or re-identification allows members to portray cognitions, emotions and behaviors that are compatible with the desired direction of the change at the organization.

The case of Bell again provides an example of the shifts in identification that are necessary to effect the major change. Tunstall indicates that the 'mindset and methodologies' of Bell members had to shift toward a market orientation and away from a regulated utility mode as the entrepreneurial spirit became desirable in the new environment (1985: 50). Bell employees had come to accept new values such that innovation, aggressiveness and fast responsiveness were seen to outweigh company loyalty, lifetime employment and consensus decision making, which prevailed in the past. As members enact their new identifications, they help institutionalize the change at the organization.

Through communication, management attempts to influence employees to accept the changes. Major change constitutes a context of high ambiguity and people who experience such ambiguity often look for clues in the environment that may help them interpret the situation (Weick, 1985); they become highly attentive to communication from management (Schweiger &

DeNisi, 1991). Such communication encourages employees to divest themselves of previous identity attachments and to appropriate the new perspectives and behaviors articulated in the new vision. Management engages in dis-identification and re-identification inducement strategies, which rely on dissociation and association.

Dissociation strategies, as explained above, imply identification by antithesis, as when a common enemy is evoked. In the case of major change, the enemy evoked may be the organization represented by its 'old' identity. Its attributes become the target of dis-identification. For example, in her study of the US Post Office Department reorganization, Biggart (1977) found that top managers who had the mandate to effect the change resorted to a discreditation of the organizational attributes prior to the change. Former policies, management style, structural arrangements, were all denigrated, while new arrangements and attributes were praised. We would thus expect dis-identification inducement, which is aimed toward identity divestiture (Van Maanen, 1978), to proceed through the use of dissociation strategies. Dissociation tactics would emphasize the lack of attractiveness of past organizational attributes and the lack of compatibility of such attributes with members' current goals and requirements for success.

Research indicates that individuals dissociate themselves from identity-stigmatizing events or groups that are negatively viewed (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Re-interpreting past organizational attributes negatively provides an impetus for members to dissociate themselves from those stigmatizing attributes and the behaviors they imply. Adherence to such attributes would result in a negative identity for the members, one that does not serve their interests. Management communication during major change is often explicit about what members stand to lose personally by adhering to old patterns. These tactics would create tension for members to divest the old perspectives.

Dis-identification creates a condition of uncertainty and loss of meaning for the member. Through communication, management infuses the situation with new meaning by providing interpretations of the 'new' organization and the members' role in it. Management employs re-identification inducement strategies aimed at what Van Maanen (1978) calls 'identity investiture'. These strategies create an association between members and new organizational attributes articulated in the vision for the organization. Association tactics would place emphasis on the distinctiveness and attractiveness of the projected organizational attributes, and on the compatibility of such attributes with individual values and requirements for success in the changed environment. Individuals are drawn to organizations with distinctive identities (Dutton et al., 1994). The prospect of belonging to such organizations is consistent with members' interests

and therefore, can provide a drive for members to appropriate the new attributes.

Confluence

Complete destruction of the old organization and a totally new construction are hardly possible or desirable (Bartunek, 1993). Studies indicate that wide-scope fundamental change leaves individuals in a state of uncertainty and with a sense of loss of meaning and value, which account for why individuals tend to hold on to the past and to resist change (Tannenbaum & Hanna, 1985). Major change is more likely to occur when some aspects of the system can be depended upon to persist. Bartunek (1993) points out that continuity in one dimension of the organization can create an important context for the experience of change in other dimensions. Those aspects that persist provide anchors to the individual and act as an impediment to one's floundering into the uncertain and meaningless. Individuals strive for self-consistency (Shamir, 1990) and are more willing to embrace changes that do not erode all the familiar perspectives and behaviors that make life predictable and valued.

When streams from the past flow alongside new streams in the present, individuals witness a situation of 'confluence' (Schmiedeck, 1979). Individuals strive for some consistency in their self-definition and this consistency can be provided when their identifications do not have to be completely destroyed, and when organizations provide them with the opportunity to experience confluence. For example, Tunstall (1985) found that during the AT&T transformation, management had to demonstrate that it continued to foster the customer service value, which had been a defining element of the organization and its members. Persistence in upholding this value provided members with links to the past and thus, with some sense of self-consistency.

It is likely that in the AT&T case, confluence was established in part through the consistent use of labels that prevailed in the past. A label such as 'customer service' is expansive and allows a wide variety of interpretations (Cheney & Christensen, 2000); it can be used to provide links between the past, present and future. Weick indicates that 'words induce stable connections . . . to which people can orient' (1985: 128). While 'customer service' may take on new dimensions after the introduction of the change at the organization, the label and the general principle it portrays can provide some continuity to members.

In a study of the rhetorical strategies used in a religious institution's council position statement on sexism, McMillan found attempts 'to balance the elements of accommodation and resistance' (1988: 339). While resistance

is apparent in the retention of and adherence to traditional beliefs, accommodation is evident in the adoption of a new worldview. Rather than take a polar stance, the council opted for the middle ground, calling for 'some willingness to accommodate' while re-affirming its adherence to the theological tradition (1988: 340). Consistently with Berger's (1969) admissions, McMillan found that the church council avoided extreme choice, 'bargaining its way through the alignment process' (1988: 339). Interestingly, while making the claim that 'We should change our attitudes on sexism', the document bases it on the premise that 'The Bible does not promote sexism' (1988: 340). The argument is framed to induce the member who identifies with the Church and who adheres to the Bible, to adopt the new attitude toward sexism. While the document makes an appeal for members to adhere to the traditional identifications, it also reframes or expands the meaning of those traditions.

Persistent connections between the past, present and future often lie in the framing of the past and future organizational attributes and experience. Through communication strategies, management can portray some continuity in combination with dissociation and association, in attempting to encourage employees to identify with the changes required.

Empirical illustration

To explore empirically the identification-inducement strategies used in a context of change, articles taken from the house organs of two Canadian organizations are analyzed. Employee publications often address issues that management deems important. Although house organ articles are not necessarily written by managers, they do nevertheless reflect managerial viewpoints (Cheney, 1983).

The articles are taken from the Bank of Montreal (BMO) and the Royal Bank of Canada (RB) house organs. Both banks are among the largest financial institutions in Canada and have implemented major changes during the last decade. Because of space limitations, one house organ article addressing the issue of change is analyzed for each bank.

'Moving into the lead' is the article taken from BMO's house organ. It provides a statement by BMO's Chairman and CEO regarding a new manager profile needed at the bank. 'Building a sales culture' is taken from RB's house organ. It reports on new RB practices and how employees view and deal with them. These articles' templates have been observed by other researchers to occur in house organs (for example, Cheney, 1983; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; McMillan, 1987). It is highly common to portray viewpoints

of bank executives and to report on new organizational practices in internal publications.

It should be noted that the empirical information reported here is not intended to be an exhaustive portrayal of identification-inducement strategies used by management; rather it is used to illustrate some of the strategies used in the context of major change. It should also be noted that the term 'strategies' utilized in the analysis does not necessarily refer to intentional techniques used by the organization and its representatives. Cheney (1983) indicates that formal messages from management may contain both intended and unintended appeals. We do not know to what extent the strategies apparent in the house organ articles were chosen intentionally. What we know is that particular strategies were evident, and these strategies, intended or not, may have an impact on member identification.

'Moving into the lead'

In BMO's 'Moving into the lead', Matthew Barrett, Chairman and CEO, addresses the 'biggest challenge facing the bank today . . . – how to transform our managers into leaders'. He makes striking contrasts between the past attributes of the bank and the past typical manager profile on one hand,

Table 1 'Moving into the lead' – BMO

<i>Past attributes of bank and employees</i>	<i>Desired attributes of bank and employees</i>
'We all rose up through a system where bosses gave orders and workers carried them out. The rules were clearly written and the lines were clearly drawn . . . (G)ood managing is no longer enough.'	'Now, our managers have to adapt to a new system where they must inspire instead of just issuing orders, motivate rather than dictate . . . We need people who are creative and proactive and capable of inspiring everybody around them . . .'
People who put 'their own short-term interests' ahead of 'the long-term good of the bank.'	People whose priority 'is the long-term good of the bank.'
'We have some tough battles ahead. And you can't manage troops into battle –'	'You have to lead them.'
'The men and women who excel at the bank . . . won't just be effective turf-protectors. Or first-rate forecasters. Or excellent administrators. They won't just be managers.'	'The men and women who excel at the Bank will be those who embrace this distinction . . . They will be leaders.'

and those desired in the future on the other hand. Table 1 provides quotations that outline the contrast between the old and the new desired order.

This article is almost completely built along the contrast between the orders. Clearly, the old order is presented as highly unattractive; people issued orders, dictated, were turf-protectors. There are implicit negative value judgments in these statements. In stark contrast, the new order calls for people to inspire, motivate and create. It is an attractive image that can confer distinction on those willing to embrace it. We are further told that 'We have to come to terms with the fact that leadership, not administrative excellence, is the new standard of success at the Bank'. Past organizational and individual attributes are derided; they are a threat and are subject to dissociation. The new system is attractive, and confers a positive identity and personal benefits on those who accept it; it is subject to association.

'Building a sales culture'

In 'Building a sales culture' from RB's house organ, a customer service representative is featured reflecting on her consciousness of having made a transition to a salesperson. This article also draws contrasts between the old and the new order as Table 2 indicates.

This article uses dissociation and association strategies by outlining the contrasts between the past and present. Issues dominant in the past include 'paperwork' and a 'transaction-based culture' – issues with negative and

Table 2 'Building a sales culture' – RB

<i>Past attributes of bank and employees</i>	<i>Desired attributes of bank and employees</i>
'Not so long ago, abandoning the wicket to prospect for a sale would have been unusual, if not unthinkable . . . (Y)ou would be doing it to "push product" on unsuspecting customers. Or so some thought.'	'Once considered the brash cousin of service, sales is now considered the other side of the same coin . . . Selling isn't wrapped around products. "Instead, focus on understanding the client's needs and help to find a solution that works for that client. That's why we say sales equals service equals sales."'
'Take Karen Kroon. As a manager of customer service in Beaconsfield, Quebec, her job used to revolve mostly around paperwork.'	'"Now, as a sales manager I'm better able to feel the pulse of the branch, talking to staff, and coaching them to look for opportunities to see what clients need and find solutions," (says Kroon).'
'Transaction-based culture.'	'Sales-based culture.'

unattractive overtones. Selling products to customers was negatively viewed because it was equated with 'push(ing) products on unsuspecting customers'. Today however, 'sales equals service equals sales', so that by defining its mission in terms of sales, the bank is actually serving the customer – it is helping 'to find a solution' that works for the client. This is an attractive mission for employees who define their roles in terms of serving customers. By associating themselves with the sales culture and appropriating the behaviors it prescribes, employees will be fulfilling an attractive customer service role – that of helping the clients find a solution that works for them.

We are told that at the organizational level, there is a 'new appreciation' for sales that has reached 'every part of the bank'. For the individual, this translates into a willingness 'to step outside (one's) comfort zone and try new things (if one is) not naturally outgoing', says Teresa Burch, an employee at Winnipeg's St Mary's branch. Since we are told that the sales-based culture is the new direction in every part of the bank, we can deduce that those who embrace this new aspect stand to gain the most. In fact, we are told that those who have experienced the shifts in identification in the direction of the new, desired attributes are thriving: 'I can't wait to get to work in the morning', Patricia Bell, an employee, is reported as saying. The personal rewards to be attained by following the new norms are not only intrinsic, but also extrinsic for the bank is 'looking at various ways of paying for performance'. The call for dissociation from the past paperwork and transaction processing and association with the new view of sales as a means of finding solutions to customers and achieving personal rewards is clear.

Discussion

Although the two articles differ from each other in some ways, both employ dis-identification and re-identification inducement tactics. Evidence of the common ground tactics observed by Cheney (1983) and DiSanza and Bullis (1999) can be seen, especially in the RB article. For example, the tactic of advocacy of benefits appears in the promises RB makes regarding the monetary rewards associated with sales. Recognizing individual contributions is evident in the praise Teresa Burch receives for referring a couple to a mortgage officer, which subsequently led to a sale. Testimonials by employees are evident in the statements of employees, who have embraced the sales requirement and who are thriving under it.

It is worth noting the extent to which the common ground tactics rely on the subtle use of arguments by model and by example. Perelman indicates that a model is presented in argument as a specific case to be imitated. He

also points out that argument by example 'presupposes the existence of certain regularities of which the examples provide a concretization' (Perelman, 1982: 106). The individuals portrayed in the RB article such as Karen Kroon and Patricia Bell, are models and examples of employees who have made the transition from embracing the old perspectives to appropriating the new, desired attributes. These are ordinary employees, in a branch like any other branch at the bank, who have experienced shifts in identification and have succeeded by doing so. What they have achieved is subtly portrayed by management as a target of identification to ordinary employees in the bank. We can thus add *exemplification* to the common ground tactics suggested by Cheney (1983) and by DiSanza and Bullis (1999). Exemplification as an identification inducement tactic is particularly valuable in the case of change, where skepticism about the change is likely to prevail and concrete examples of success with the new order can be particularly persuasive.

In the case of BMO, no explicit references are made to specific employees. In the article, Barrett himself appears as the model in what is an example of 'enactment rhetoric' (Campbell & Jamieson, 1995: 394) whereby the speaker embodies the argument and provides proof of its truth. Barrett was viewed by internal and external stakeholders as an exceptional, visionary and creative leader who made a personal positive impact on BMO (for example, *Financial Post*, 1 July 1995). For his many achievements at the bank, he was chosen CEO of the year in Canada in 1995. In the house organ article, Barrett explicitly speaks about, and implicitly stands as a model of what a leader at the bank should be.

The articles also reveal the specificities of the dissociation strategies that relate to a context of change. Whereas Cheney (1983) and DiSanza and Bullis (1999) observed very few occurrences of dissociation in the house organs they studied, both the RB and BMO articles make extensive use of dissociation. Furthermore, whereas the previous studies have posited external threats to be the subject of dissociation, the current illustrations indicate that some past attributes of the organization itself are subject to dis-identification. The change situation leads to a partial reversal of the targets of dissociation. Interestingly, the targets of both, dis-identification and re-identification during change are aspects of the organization in which the employee has membership.

The two articles, however, also refer to external threats employees are expected to bond together against. In the case of BMO, we are told that there are tough battles ahead and one cannot manage troops into battle, one has to lead them. RB is more explicit about the external threat. Its article indicates that 'all of Canada's financial institutions are moving . . . to a sales-based culture. Competition to get there first and best is fierce. It's a high

stakes battle.' In other words, there is a distinctiveness (being first and best) to be achieved by appropriating the requirements of a sales-based culture. The competition is evoked as an external threat encouraging the internal parties to bond in order to achieve distinctiveness.

In addition to inducing employees to divest themselves of certain perspectives and to appropriate new ones, the RB article establishes confluence. For example, Julie Ann Wilton, a 24-year employee at the bank, indicates that 'selling has always been part of the job. But before MPM (an integrated program to the management of sales), we didn't have the tools to help us with our sales.' Thus selling is not a new concept at the bank, and has always been an acceptable practice, which was hindered mainly by the absence of the appropriate tools in the past. Confluence can be established by reframing the meaning of past experience so it appears consistent with the present and future requirements.

Furthermore, employees are told that 'sales equals service equals sales'. RB's internal and external publications boast consistently of the high level of service the bank provides, and portray the importance of this value for the organization and its employees. For the employee who identifies with the quality service imperative, engaging in sales should logically follow. To enact one's identification with the role of provider of quality service, one must engage in sales, the RB article implies. The value of providing high quality service is one employees have already appropriated, possibly through previous inculcation by the organization – to use the language of enthymeme₂ proposed by Tompkins and Cheney (1985). The sales imperative, introduced around the mid-1990s at the bank, is said to represent another instance of the application of a value premise inculcated in the members of the organization in the past. While 'quality service' as a label and a value persists, new applications of the quality service provision are introduced indicating a confluence between the past (a persistent label and value) and the present (new applications). Through language, subtle shifts in the desired targets of identification are produced while the appearance of continuity is maintained.

McMillan and Hyde posit that the reconciliation of the old order with the new 'might be the central and overriding mark of eloquence in all change oratory' (2000: 40). Such mark of eloquence, however, is absent from BMO's article where there is little evidence of confluence. The past and the future appear to be in almost complete opposition to each other. In fact, Barrett presents the 'manager' as a label from the past and provides a replacement for the future in the 'leader' label. The implication is that neither the practices nor the labels from the past are expected to be maintained as targets of identification in the future.

In adopting a polar position as opposed to the middle ground

(McMillan, 1988), Barrett provides no opportunity for an anchorage in the past to those employees displeased with the need to adopt the 'leader's' style. This is likely to make the shift in identification more difficult. In fact, DiSanza and Bullis (1999) indicate that when personal experiences contradict persuasive efforts by the organization, the latter's discourse is ignored and members will rely on their past experiences to guide their interpretations. We do not know why Barrett adopted a radical position on the issue of managers and leaders, or what the direct effect of this position was. We do know, however, that the notion of destruction, although extreme, is useful to describe organizational attributes that are in disfavor or have lost their use, for destruction involves discrediting past structures (Biggart, 1977). The little emphasis on continuity, and the radical destruction portrayed in the BMO article, underscore the fact that the past is regarded as a liability infringing on the possibility for success in the future. Furthermore, we also know that Barrett was considered a leader of vision, who stayed at the top of BMO until 1998. McMillan indicates that 'when organizational leadership is strong and secure, the organization speaks boldly' (1988: 330).

Although Barrett takes a polar position and speaks boldly, he also acknowledges the pain and by doing so, legitimates and builds on the experience of the audience: 'It's not an easy transformation. How could it be? We all rose up through a system where bosses gave orders and workers carried them out.' As importantly, the pain is implicitly declared to be shared by all, Barrett included. The last statement in the previous quotation provides evidence of the assumed 'we', which establishes a subtle connection between the rhetor and the audience. In fact, both the BMO and RB articles make numerous implicit associations, merging the interests and values of the organization with those of the individual.

These two cases illustrate various strategies that induce employee identification during change. Influencing members to accept the change may involve a reframing of the meaning of organizational experience: some parts of the past are shown in a negative light, other parts of the past are portrayed as persistent and the future is presented as bright and distinctive. Throughout, the language used establishes an alignment between the organization's and the individual's interests, and subtly invites new identifications and acceptance of the change.

Conclusion

This article argued that the concept of organizational identification provides important new insights into change dynamics because it sheds light on the

individual–organization relationship. Although existing identification frameworks provide useful insights and a good starting point, they do not address the specificities of identification and its inducement during change. The article proposed that the terms *dis-identification* and *re-identification* capture and portray the shifts required in identification and its inducement during change and that both association and dissociation tactics are extensively used. It was suggested that association tactics be expanded to include ‘exemplification’, which provides models of ordinary employees appropriating targets of identification successfully and that this tactic is particularly useful during change when uncertainty about new targets often prevails. It was also found that dissociation strategies are highly prevalent during change, unlike more stable contexts. More importantly, however, dissociation is aimed at some targets within the organization itself as opposed to only targets external to it.

The article introduced the notion of confluence and argued that this is an element that facilitates organizational change. Confluence of continuity and change in identifications makes the change easier to accept by employees. Confluence can be established through the use of past labels and values and reframing these to include new applications required by the change. In the case providing little, if any evidence of confluence, it was found that leadership was bold and visionary and that the pain involved in the change was acknowledged, legitimated and portrayed as shared by the rhetor and the audience. Implicit and explicit links between the organization and the individual permeate the inducement strategies and these links are established through language.

Language is used to portray the potentially contestable organizational change as one employees are willing to embrace because it allows them to gain a more distinctive social identity and to express it, and because it is consistent with members’ interests since those who adopt the changes will benefit the most. Past research has postulated that reframing accompanies change efforts (for example, Bartunek, 1993). This article argues that reframing works to equate the organization’s new goals with those of the employees and to portray these goals as the desired targets of identification.

However, the new frames and targets must be appropriated by the members for change to take effect. The occurrence of identification is an internal process from an employee standpoint. Although it is encouraged by different management tactics, it has to be met by an acceptance of the new target of identification by the members. Future research needs to shift the level of analysis to the individual and study how members perceive and react to different identification-inducement strategies used by management during

change. Such research also needs to look into the conditions under which members appropriate (or not) the new targets of identification and whether they get to speak in management's language.

Finally, Burke affirms that 'an important ingredient in the meaning of . . . words is precisely the attitudes and acts which go with them' (1965: 177). It is hoped that the claims made in this article will foster the use of identification-related words and labels in future research on organizational change. These words and labels provide meaningful insights into the important subject of change.

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